Encyclopaedia Aristasiana

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Thame

"... as Her universal music rules the farthest spheres, so does it tune the beating of my heart ..."

Thamë is one of the most important concepts in Aristasian culture. Aristasia, both East and West, may be described as a thamë (or thamic) society.

As a rough guide it is sometimes said that the word is pronounced tah-may, and this pronunciation is adequate for a foreigner. In fact, the first syllable begins with the "hard" Aristasian "th" sound rather than the English "t" sound, and the final vowel is like the "e" in "bet" only lengthened, rather than the diphthong "ay".

Sai Thamë

All fundamental concepts and realities have Celestial prototypes. The source and fount of all worldly thamë is Sai Thamë.

Sai Thamë is one of the Seven Great Janyati, corresponding to Tellurian Jupiter. She is known as "the Great Benefic". Some Tellurians adopt the image of Sri Saraswati as a representation of Sai Thamë, because, like Sai Thamë in Aristasia Pura, she is depicted holding a musical instrument - although Sri Saraswati probably corresponds more closely to Sai Mati. The figure of Justice with sword and scales is also related to Sai Thamë.

More on Sai Thamë

The Concept of Thamë

Thamë spelled with a small "t" designates the concept of thamë. This is sometimes translated as "harmony", at other times as "order".

This harmony is the fundamental order of the cosmos that "holds the stars within their courses (and) ... a drop of dew pendent upon a blade of grass". The harmony and rules that govern human life is understood to be the same harmony that rules the Universe.

The movements of the stars are often depicted as a dance, and all

human actions (as well as such things as the passage of the seasons, the rhythm of day and night, the phases of the moon) are seen as part of this same dance. This dance is what is termed thamë.

In the life of maid, one of the fundamental pillars of thamë is the concept of the Golden Chain. The Golden Chain is that which connects the whole of society together in a hierarchical order. It runs from Dea (in the form of Sai Raya) to the Empress, and from the Empress, down through every level and degree of society, to the humblest serving-maid.

Each maid is a golden link within the Chain. Each has her own special place, defined by such things as her age, her sex, her Estate, her nation, her family and her sithamë - her own personal calling or inner-thamë.

Thamë manifests itself in Aristasian behaviour in a thousand daily ways: a formal etiquette; care of personal appearance and dress, which must at all times reflect the proper grace and dignity of maid; the constant honouring of the Golden Heart in each maid by greeting her with Rayati and the Reverence; kindness and gentleness in manner and behaviour ("in Aristasia ... unkindness is regarded as unnatural" (*The District Governess*, p.15); deference toward superiors; chivalry toward inferiors (and by brunettes toward blondes); a high value placed upon childlike innocence and goodness; a high degree of both trustfulness and trustworthiness in both private and business relationships. These and many other aspects of Aristasian life reflect the ideal and daily practice of thamë.

In much of the East, and in more traditional families in the West, the concept of life as a dance is almost literal, with all movements (especially on the part of blondes) being consciously gentle, formal and graceful. It is said that in the Golden Age all speech was in verse or in song. Where these standards have to some extent lapsed, especially in the north-west and far west, there is no doubt in any mind that this lapse is for the worse and that "we are inferior to our ancestresses." This in itself tends to help the lapse not to go too far.

Thamë, as manifested in the cosmos and in Aristasian society, is often termed the Golden Order.

Thamë as described in The District Governess

The District Governess (1996) by Miss Regina Snow contains a near perfect definition of thamë, while replacing the word with an ancient Greek equivalent for reasons of propriety, considering its rather "cosmopolitan" readership (only the River Thamë - sacred, of course, to the Janya - is explicitly mentioned in the book):

Harmony, Comeliness, Seemliness: such are the watchwords of Aristasian "Law and Order" — a phrase from another land which would not be in the least out of place upon Aristasian lips, but would

carry with it quite another colouring. All law, to the Aristasian, is akin to the laws of mathematics or of music — an expression of the underlying harmony of being; all order fundamentally the order of a dance, which is ultimately the great dance of the cosmos, presided over by Themis the Angel of Harmony (the correct name is Thamë, but in view of the wide "profane" readership of these books, the authoress uses an Ancient Greek equivalent — Editress). *To an Aristasian, grace in the sense of "gracefulness" is not a different concept from grace in the theological sense. They are intimately bound up one with another - and all of life is intimately bound up with them.* p.23.

It would be hard, a decade later, to improve upon this description of what thamë is and what it means to Aristasians.

Thamë and the Law

Law in Aristasia is founded upon the concept of thamë. This is discussed at length in *The District Governess*, since Aristasian discipline is a large part of the book's theme.

There are no prisons in Aristasia and only a few law-courts. Punishment is more personal, more home-like. Indeed, the distinction between the public and the private is one which Aristasians do not strongly recognise. Society is considered to be a greater family with the Queen or Empress or local Governor or Countess (depending on what level we are considering) as its mother, and her servants as elder sisters.

This last sentence requires two comments. First, that elder sisters are highly regarded as figures of authority in Aristasia and second that every constabel, judge, District Governess and other agent of the law is regarded as a servant of the Queen or local Magistra. Law is personal rather than impersonal. This does not (as the outlander might suppose) leave it open to vagary and abuse because Aristasia (like more traditional forms of society elsewhere) is a unanimous society. There is no real disagreement about what is right, or what people ought to do. There is no real disagreement that custom is sacred. Every action of life is ultimately determined by spiritual law and the wisdom of the Revered Ancestresses. The power of the Magistra (meaning any ruler and also a court judge) to uphold custom and the Sacred Harmony is absolute; but she is not an Absolute Ruler, because she, no less — indeed far more — than any other, is the servant of the Harmony (the authoress is here "translating" the word thamë — Editress). *She cannot invent her own laws. She can impose her own will but only within the strict and time-honoured limits of what is proper.*

There have been many changes in recent centuries, but Aristasia has changed without becoming anti-traditional. Each of the new ways is incorporated within the Sacred Harmony [thamë] and becomes a part of its new adaptation — and each of the provinces has done this in a slightly different way.

The law in Aristasia covers many things which in some other places

might not be recognised as having a legal, or even a moral, dimension. Such things as slovenly dress, impoliteness or vulgar language may be dealt with by the police.

...

As the title "Governess" implies. Aristasian subjects are, in certain respects, treated throughout life as children in the great family of the Empress. The captured law-breaker in Aristasia feels more like a child outside the headmistress's study than an adult trapped by the pitiless machine of the State. There is never absent an understanding on all sides that punishment is given with love and for the true good of the culprit, to bring her back into grace and restore her to the heart of the Familia. Although the true dignity of an Aristasian is far greater than that of a person in a degenerate land (as may be seen by the unfailing neatness of dress of even the lowliest subject), her consciousness of herself as a child, makes her more supple and yielding in the hands of public discipline. She has not built her persona upon a hard and brittle "personal independence" which must be stripped and crushed by the punishing State, reducing her almost to the level of nonentity. Rather she can be corrected as a child is corrected:— sometimes severely but with love and with her own tearful acceptance. It is an act which unites her rather than severing her from the whole, which leaves her neither broken nor bitter, but at peace, and happier than before. pp. 21-22.

This last paragraph perhaps takes us away from the strict subject of thamë and onto a closely related one - that of society as a *familia* - the great extended family of the Empress - and of Aristasians as closer to the state reserved for children in Telluria. The concepts of interdependence and of innocence have much to do with this. Childlike innocence and goodness are prized by Aristasians as the highest virtues. Independence and conspicuous individualism are not much valued. This is deeply connected with the understanding that the social order and the Divine Order are one; that obedience to one is obedience to the other; and that being good means being in step with the Great Dance.

Life in the Light of Thamë

Because Western Aristasia, unlike Telluria, did not enter a revolutionary phase in order to become "modern" (cf. the article on Rationalism), Aristasia remains, like all traditional civilisations, a unanimous society rather than a factionalised society. Western Telluria, from its leading institutions downward - with its political parties and institutionalised "opposition" is a formally factionalised society. Western-Tellurian "democracy" is, by definition, government by faction. The very term politics, which in Aristasia means "the art of ruling the state" and, by implication, the art of preserving Harmony is, in Telluria, a byword for opposition and faction-fighting. Western Tellurian business also is characterised by an ideology of cut-throat competition and the belief that this is "healthy". The society as a whole is characterised by the extreme-patriarchal spirit of Vikhelic conflict and opposition.

It is necessary to mention this in order to clarify how very different is the Aristasian approach to these things. Aristasians do not war among themselves, have not had a revolutionary phase at any time, and in terms of politics, business and all other activities, continually regard thamë, or harmony, as the fundamental necessity.

While hierarchical societies may be seen by Western Tellurians as arrogantly imposing their will on people, in Aristasia the reverse is the case. In the first place the hierarchical rulers are strictly bound by custom and tradition, by the Golden Order; and in the second place, the need for harmony is fundamental. In coming to decisions - whether a Queen's Cabinet or the Governing Table of a business or the Mistress-table of a craft guild be in question - discussions are long, careful and very polite, and designed to arrive at formulations that will be pleasing an acceptable to all. This is less difficult than it would be in Telluria because of the fundamental agreement on principles that underlies a traditional society, and a co-operative spirit that is the very reverse of institutionalised factionalism of Telluria.

However, once a decision is made and the head of the hierarchy has made her ruling, all members of the ruling group will support the decision absolutely. Usually they will be in agreement, for every effort will have been made to accommodate all views, and Aristasians are naturally co-operative, but if misgivings are still present, these will be put aside in the name of Harmony.

Harmony is the mainspring of Aristasian life and thought, so often what in Telluria would be thought of as expediency or common sense will take second place to considerations of harmony.

It is also axiomatic that in every undertaking, from laying a table to making a vase to ruling a State, there is a right way and a wrong way of doing it. The Golden Order dictates the way things are done. All actions are rituals. Even if this is less the case in the West, no one doubts that all actions *ought* to be rituals and that there *is* a Right Way, even if one is being a little lazy about it, or has not been properly instructed. Thus the concept of the Golden Order may suddenly be invoked in the most surprising contexts, even in the most apparently casual Western society (which is never as casual as very late Western Tellurian society in any case).

The preservation of Harmony is also bound up with the fact that bonds of friendship, and Amity run through every Aristasian group, bonding it together and creating relationships of trust, obligation and harmonious generosity.

The concept of the Golden Order also influences Aristasian ideas about rudeness. Essentially a rude action is one that steps out of the dance of thamë. Thus, in the Aristasian detectives story, "The Adventure of the Crystal Staff", the somewhat eccentric Professor Calver attributes ignorance to the College Mistress and immediately apologises with the words: "Oh, pray forgive me. That was very ad lib". The underlying thought behind this expression is that there is a proper "script" that should be followed and that rudeness constitutes stepping outside that "script" - departing from the

correct ritual "form" - and ad-libbing.

Another significant expression for rudeness is *enormacy* when one commits an enormacy or enormity, the meaning of the word is not that one's transgression was "large", but that it was *e-normate* "outside the Norm", the Norm being the Golden Order, the correct form, or simply put, thamë.

The River Thamë

The river Thamë runs from the Northeast Amazonian highlands, through Arcadia Novaria and Trent to the Sea of Doves. For some of its length it forms the border between Novaria and Trent. It is by far the longest river known in the West and is sacred to Sai Thamë. In olden times it is said that some saw the River as an embodiment of the Janya herself.

Many important towns and cities and other places of historic signifcance lie along the vast length of the Thamë. The great city of Goldhaven/Westeringsea lies about a mile from the sea on the Thamë delta. This is actually two cities connected by several bridges: Goldhaven on the Trentish side and Westeringsea on the Novarian side. However, the interdependence and interrelation of the two cities is so great that they are in many respects regarded as one.

See Also

Sai Thamë

Being in Thamë

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